

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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AMEMBASSY SAIGON

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 11823

E.O. 11652: GDS

SUBJECT: THAI MARITIME COMPANY

1. THE EMBASSY RECENTLY RECEIVED A LETTER FROM CHUMPHON MANINET, FORMER MP FROM CHAOCHENGSAO PROVINCE AND FOUNDER OF THE RECENTLY CREATED DEMOCRACY PARTY OF THAILAND. THE LETTER ACCUSE THE UNITED STATES OF FOSTERING WAR IN SOUTHEAST ASIA THROUGH THE TRANSPORTATION OF MILITARY SUPPLIES TO OUR ALLIES BY THE THAI MARITIME COMPANY (TMC), A SOLE SOURCE MILITARY CONTRACTOR. HE FURTHER CHARGES THAT THE THAI PEOPLE DERIVE NO BENEFIT FROM THIS MONOPOLY BECAUSE TMC SUBCONTRACTS TO NON-THAI COMPANIES WHICH DO NOT PAY TAXES. THE LETTER HINTS AT CORRUPTION AND CHUMPHON THREATENS TO "DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE" TO TERMINATE THE CONTRACT AND END THE TRANSPORTATION OF MILITARY SUPPLIES.

2. CHUMPHON, A KNOWN PUBLICITY SEEKER, IS VERY LIKELY TO TAKE THIS ISSUE TO THE MEDIA TO ATTRACT ATTENTION TO HIS NEW POLITICAL PARTY. IN 1969 HE INSTIGATED THE "GREAT TUGBOAT SCANDAL" CENTERING ON THE NON-PAYMENT OF TAXES BY A SINGAPOREAN COMPANY HIRED TO PROVIDE TUG
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ASSISTANCE AT SATTAHIP PORT. THE ISSUE WAS KEPT ALIVE IN

THE PRESS FOR 18 MONTHS, PASSING FROM MEDIA ATTENTION
AFTER THE 1971 COUP.

3. AS LATE AS MAY THIS YEAR, THERE WAS LOCAL MEDIA
COVERAGE OF THE TUG AND BARGE ACTIVITIES OUT OF SATTAHIP/
VAYAMA PODC.

HOWEVER, GIVEN THE CURRENT SENSITIVITIES OF
THE THAI GOVERNMENT TO CHARGES BY THE PRESS THAT THAI
SOVEREIGNTY HAS BEEN COMPROMISED OVER US MILITARY PRESENCE,
IT CAN BE EXPECTED THAT CHUMPHON'S CHARGES ARE LIKELY TO
GENERATE RENEWED NEGATIVE PRESS INTEREST AND PUT PRESSURE
ON THE RTG AND USG TO CEASE THESE OPERATION.

4. IN ANTICIPATION OF THIS, AND IN AN ATTEMPT TO LIMIT
PUBLIC ATTENTION TO THE TUG AND BARGE OPERATIONS TO
CAMBODIA, THE FOLLOWING Q'S AND A'S ARE PROPOSED AS
A RESPONSE TO QUERIES, IF ASKED:

Q: CAN YOU CONFIRM THAT THESE TUGS AND BARGES ARE
INVOLVED IN CARRYING WEAPONS AND MUNITIONS TO CAMBODIA?

A: THIS HAS BEEN REPORTED ALREADY IN THAI
NEWSPAPERS. ON 24 APRIL, THAI NEWSMEN VISITED THE DEEP
WATER PORT AT SATTAHIP WHERE THEY RECEIVED A TOUR AND
BRIEFING, WHICH INCLUDED THE OPERATION OF THESE TUGS AND
BARGES. THE TUGS AND BARGES TRANSPORT FOOD STUFFS AND
MEDICAL SUPPLIES AS WELL AS MILITARY ITEMS.

Q: WHO ACTUALLY OPERATES THE TUGS AND BARGES?

A: THE CONTRACT IS HELD BY THE THAI MARITIME
COMPANY. QUESTIONS ABOUT THAT COMPANY'S OPERATIONS WOULD
MORE APPROPRIATELY BE DIRECTED TO IT.

Q: CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THIS CONTRACT? FOR
EXAMPLE, DO THE TUGS AND BARGES BELONG TO TMC?

A: THE CONTRACT WAS SIGNED BY THE US MILITARY
SEALIFT COMMAND AND TMC IN 1973. IT IS RENEWABLE EVERY
THREE MONTHS. FIVE OF THE BARGES BELONG TO THE USG.
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE OWNERSHIP OF THE OTHERS MIGHT BETTER
GO TO TMC.

Q: WHY DOESN'T THAILAND RECEIVE TAXES FROM THIS
OPERATION?

A: THAT'S THE SORT OF QUESTION THAT MIGHT MORE
APPROPRIATELY BE DIRECTED TO THE CONTRACTOR.
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Q: HOW MANY TUGS AND BARGES ARE INVOLVED?

A: IN THE TRANSPORT OF SUPPLIES TO CAMBODIA 13
TUGS AND 15 BARGES ARE INVOLVED.

Q: ARE ANY AMERICAN PERSONNEL INVOLVED IN THE
OPERATION OF THESE TUGS AND BARGES?

A: THAI MARITIME COMPANY RUNS THE OPERATION ON
CONTRACT.

Q: WHAT ROUTE DO THEY USE TO REACH CAMBODIA?

A: THIS HAS ALL BEEN REPORTED IN THE PRESS
PREVIOUSLY. THEY GO UP THE MEKONG RIVER.

QC WHAT AMOUNT OF SUPPLIES DO THESE TUGS AND
BARGES DELIVER TO CAMBODIA?

A: CURENTLY 13,000 TO 15,000 TONS PER MONTH.

Q: IS THIS AN INCREASE OR DECREASE OVER THE PAST
SIX MONTHS?

Q: HAS THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT BEEN
CONSULTED ABOUT THIS OPERATION, AND HAS IT APPROVED?

A: IS IS US POLICY TO CONSULT AND COORDINATE ALL
MILITARY ACTIVITIES WITH THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT.

5. THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SUPREME COMMAND
(FORWARD) ARE BEING INFORMED OF CHIMPHON'S LETTER.
KINTNER

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